



Watching Your Drink: Protective Measures and Negative Consequences of Drinking

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Introduction

The purpose of this study is to analyze practices and attitudes towards alcohol use among University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire students. The objectives of this project include determining why students drink, identifying factors that moderate students' alcohol use, learning what protective measures students engage in while drinking, and assessing reported consequences of drinking. This study was developed in partnership with the Center for Alcohol Studies and Education (CASE) at UW-Eau Claire.

In this presentation, we focus on the relationship between the protective measures students engage in while drinking and the negative consequences they suffer as a result of their own drinking. We also present figures representing student's overall alcohol use and their self-perception of alcohol use.

Method

Using random sampling, UW-Eau Claire students were asked to complete an on-line questionnaire. 319 students participated. Independent sample *t*-test and bivariate analysis were used to measure association between variables.

Frequency of alcohol use was measured by asking the question, *In the past 30 days, how many days did you use alcohol?*

A series of questions were designed to capture the **protective behaviors** students engage in while drinking and how often they use them. Participants were asked, *In the past month, how often have you done the following when drinking alcohol?* Students indicated never-to-always having used the following protective behaviors: *counted your drinks, used a designated driver, alternated drinks with non-alcoholic drinks, eaten before/during drinking, kept your drink in your possession at all times, stopped drinking 1-2 hours before going home, limited the amount of money you would spend on alcohol.*

Participants also answered questions about any **negative consequences** they experienced as a result of drinking. Table 1 shows the negative consequences asked and the percentage of respondents who reported experiencing this consequence within the last year.

To begin to assess **campus norms**, respondents both estimated their self-perception of their alcohol use in comparison to the average UW-EC student as well as their perception of current alcohol use in comparison to a year ago.

Table 1: % Experienced the Following Negative Consequences (n = 306)

Been in trouble with the police, residence hall, or other college authorities	12
Gotten into an argument or fight	24
Been hurt or injured	8
Been taken advantage of sexually (unwanted contact)	4
Thought I might have a drinking/other drug problem	4
Performed poorly in a class	10
Had a memory loss	23
Got nauseated or vomited	4
Had unprotected sex	9
NONE OF THE ABOVE	44
Other, please specify	4

Figure 1: Use of Protective Measures and Negative Consequences Experienced

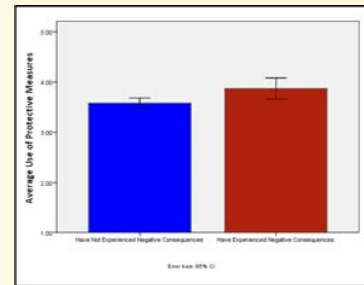


Figure 1 compares students who have and have not experienced negative consequences from drinking in relation to their use of protective measures. Figure 2 compares alcohol use between on-campus and off-campus students measured by reported number of days used alcohol in the last month. Figures 3 and 4 reports student's perceptions of alcohol use.

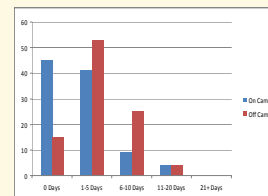


Figure 2: Student Alcohol Use by Residence

Figure 3: Self-Perception of Alcohol Use In Comparison to Other UW-EC Students

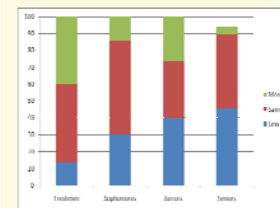
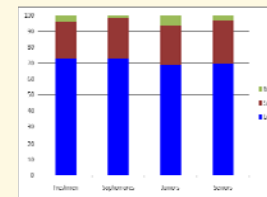


Figure 4: Perception of Alcohol Use in Comparison to a Year Ago

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Table 2: Student Alcohol Use by Class Status

Days drank alcohol in last mo.	Senior/Junior (n = 179)		Fresh/Soph (n = 140)		All (n = 319)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
0	37	20.1	56	40.0	93	29.2
1-5	91	50.8	61	43.6	152	47.6
6-10	40	22.3	15	10.7	55	17.2
11-20	7	4.0	6	4.3	13	4.1
21 or more	4	2.2	2	1.0	6	2.9

Results

Almost half of students (44%) report not experiencing negative consequences from alcohol. Alarming, 32% report having been in a fight and/or injured, while 23% report having had a memory loss (Table 1).

Bivariate analysis revealed a significant negative association between use of protective measures ($M = 3.66$, $SD = .70$) and number of negative consequences experienced ($M = 1.26$, $SD = 1.66$).

Independent *t*-test was conducted on the results shown Figure 1. Those experiencing negative consequences are using fewer protective measures with a small to medium effect size (Cohen's $d = .37$).

Figure 2 shows that 45.3% of on-campus students reported not drinking in last month, only 15.2% of off-campus students did. In general, off campus residents drank alcohol more days of the month than on campus residents.

Figure 3 shows that most students believe they are drinking less than other college students.

Students report that as they progress through college, they tend to drink less than the previous year. (Figure 4).

Table 2 shows the percentage of respondents using alcohol by class status and days of alcohol use in the last month. Mean response for number of days used alcohol in last month was 1-5, with majority reporting using alcohol 1-5 days or none (77%).

Discussion

These results indicate that there is a relationship between use of protective measures and negative consequences experienced from drinking alcohol. Interestingly, students tend to think that they drink less than the average college student. As a result, students tend to drink more to fit their perceptions of the normative college culture. As students continue through college, they tend to drink less than the previous year; freshman and sophomores are more likely to have higher or the same alcohol use in comparison to the previous year. These results suggest that student programming should include greater awareness of protective measures students can use while drinking. Programming aimed at freshman remains important and additional research regarding students' perceptions of the campus culture related to alcohol use would be useful.